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CHESTERFIELD HEIGHTS HISTORIC DISTRICT, NORFOLK, VA (122-1201)

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SUMMARY DESCRIPTION

Chesterfield Heights is a small, cohesive residential neighborhood located along the Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River in Norfolk, Virginia. The river distinctly forms the southern boundary of the neighborhood, while the Ohio Creek tributary marks the western edge. The borders are further delineated by the streetscape, with Ballentine Boulevard (originally Merrimac Street) forming the eastern edge and Interstate-264 (originally the path of Highland Avenue) defining the northern edge. The boundaries of the residential neighborhood currently occupy approximately 85 of the original 130 acres conceived by the Chesterfield Heights Corporation in 1904. The original suburb was platted westward to Fifth Street, now Filer Street, which was the eastern boundary for the late-19th-century development of Riverside. Riverside was originally improved with a number of vernacular, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival dwellings by 1900. Although originally developed earlier than Chesterfield Heights, Riverside was enveloped in the community by 1920. Developed during the first quarter of the 20th century, Chesterfield Heights emerged as a suburban community, just to the northeast of the growing downtown area of Norfolk. The neighborhood, originally aimed at catering to upper class patrons, developed with large single-family dwellings along the Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River, exhibiting revival and American movement-era styles and forms. The flat tract was landscaped with tree-lined streets, a waterfront park, and a system of roads laid in a slightly irregular grid pattern. The domestic buildings are buffered from the paved public streets by sidewalks and a grassy strip planted with mature shade trees, primarily consisting of large crepe myrtles.

Although over seventy dwellings were constructed in Riverside by 1910, the initial development of Chesterfield Heights constituted roughly thirty dwellings, primarily located along Chesterfield Boulevard and Marlboro Avenue between the years 1904-1914. Of those initial buildings, twenty-two remain in the original Riverside area and twenty-three remain within the original Chesterfield Heights boundaries. Construction was accelerated, however, as the World War I began a trend of housing needs. This created a second phase of development, spurred by the influx of middle-class professional residents, with over 247 buildings constructed between 1915 and 1950. Today, Chesterfield Heights is defined by a variety of architectural styles and building types, though primarily domestic. The houses range from the late-19th- and early-20th-century vernacular, Queen Anne, and Colonial Revival dwellings of Riverside and Chesterfield Heights to the infill housing of the late 20th century. The early-to-mid-20th-century buildings often exhibit vernacular, less detailed interpretations of the more elaborate styles erected decades earlier.

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Although a number of these dwellings have altered materials, the overall integrity remains intact. The area making up the Chesterfield Heights neighborhood consists of 326 properties, including 308 single dwellings, ten multiple dwellings, two commercial buildings, four churches, a small park with a monument, and a shipyard (with nine contributing support buildings, a contributing dock, a non-contributing dry-dock, and a non-contributing power station). Additionally there are 186 other supporting outbuildings, including seventy-four sheds, ninety garages, a water tank, two guesthouses, a trailer, and three carports. There are 292 contributing primary resources and 112 contributing secondary resources.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, the far northern and eastern regions of the City of Norfolk were characterized by their distinctly rural and marshy nature. Early building surveys and maps of the city show the area north of the Elizabeth River, east of Ohio Creek, sparsely developed, with small, random improvements located within large, open tracts of farmland. During the latter decades of the 19th century, when the city began to grow outward, many of the original farmhouses were demolished, the land tracts surveyed, and suburban plats created. Conceived as a high-class residential suburb, Chesterfield Heights was sited further east than the suburban neighborhoods of the late 19th and very early 20th centuries. Research has shown that the property, prior to platting in 1904 as Chesterfield Heights, may have contained a farmhouse or two and various associated outbuildings. Once development began, however, the resources appear to have been razed in favor of grander, more fashionable single-family suburban dwellings sited along the picturesque Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River. Many of those late-19th-century dwellings were retained within the Riverside section of Chesterfield Heights.

The new subdivision, platted in 1904, was composed of a slightly irregular grid plan with streets that took advantage of the shoreline vistas along the Eastern Branch of the Elizabeth River. As the plan was slightly skewed for this purpose, two diagonal avenues created an opportunity for a small park where the awkward intersection resulted in a space that proved inappropriate for a housing lot. The developers made a point of preserving the natural beauty of the surroundings. The focal point of the neighborhood was the scenic waterfront, which ran along the grand Chesterfield Boulevard. The East-West streets display a sixty-foot right-of-way, while the North-South streets have a fifty-foot right-of-way. Brick-

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paved streets enhance Marlboro Avenue. Most of the lots measure approximately 40 by 125 feet. Tree-lined streets, sidewalks, and the small park improved the neighborhood.

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was widespread interest in a variety of fashionable architectural styles. Many of the early dwellings feature elements and forms associated with the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles of architecture, albeit vernacular in many instances. Between 1904 and 1914, at least 100 dwellings were erected in Chesterfield Heights, including those erected in the Riverside area, with approximately forty-five remaining standing today.¹ Of those, fourteen are Queen Anne, twenty-four exhibit the Colonial Revival style of architecture, one is Italianate, and the remaining illustrate more vernacular interpretations of these styles. Many of the properties have freestanding garages and sheds associated with them that, although historic, were often constructed at a later date.

Following the heels of America's Centennial celebrations in 1876, the Colonial Revival style emerged in the early 1880s. The style, which borrowed heavily from early American architecture—particularly Georgian and Federal buildings—was largely an outgrowth of a new nationwide pride in the past and a rapidly growing interest in historic preservation. In the early phase, the Colonial Revival style remained the exclusive domain of fashionable architectural firms and was favored for the large residences of wealthy clients. In general, as the style spread to the suburbs and increased in popularity, the detailing and form became increasingly more modest. The stylistic impression presented in the first years of development in Chesterfield Heights epitomizes the suburban expression of Colonial Revival.

The majority of the Colonial Revival houses in Chesterfield Heights were constructed on brick foundations with wood-frame structural systems originally clad with shingles or weatherboard. The roofs, presently sheathed primarily in asphalt shingles, historically consisted of numerous materials with intricate pitches that spurred from the main hip or gable. The forms of the dwellings were typically accentuated by porches, dormer windows, columns, pediments, balustrades, wide cornices, transoms and patterned shingles. Excellent examples of the early, more-high-style Colonial Revival buildings include the single dwellings at 2724 Chesterfield Boulevard (1910) and 709 Forbes Street (1910), and the multiple dwelling located in the 700 Block of Thayer Street (1910). The two-and-a-half-story wood-frame dwelling at 2724 Chesterfield Heights, which encompasses many of the quintessential Colonial Revival details, measures three bays in width and features side-gabled slate roof, a one-story full-width porch with

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paneled porch posts, a molded wood cornice with returns, pedimented dormers, a porte-cochere, and an elaborate door surround with a swan's-neck broken pediment.

The Colonial Revival dwelling at 709 Forbes Street is a two-story wood-frame dwelling detailed with a full-width half-round one-story porch supported by massive Tuscan columns and decorative brackets. The front-gabled roof displays overhanging eaves and a molded cornice with wide returns. Similar in form, the two-and-a-half story wood frame multiple dwelling located at the 700 Block of Thayer Street is clad in wood shingles. Three symmetrically spaced porticos with closed tympanum pediments and brick post supports dominate the first story. The side-gabled standing-seam metal roof echoes the design of the porticos with two symmetrically placed gables. The building is further detailed with a molded wood cornice, flush fascia, multi-light double-hung sash windows, and transom lights.

Queen Anne was a building style and form exhibited in the early development of Chesterfield Heights. Among the attractions generating considerable interest at the 1876 Centennial Celebration in Philadelphia were several English buildings designed in the Queen Anne style, which would prove to be widely influential in America from the 1870s until just after the turn of the 20th century, when Chesterfield Heights was platted. The style dismissed the impractical Gothic style by emphasizing human scale and domestic comforts. In America, the style found an exuberant expression in wood, and frequently incorporated classical columns and decorative motifs borrowed from our own colonial architecture. Thus, like the Colonial Revival dwellings, the majority of the Queen Anne houses in Chesterfield Heights were originally constructed on brick foundations with wood-frame structural systems clad with shingles or weatherboard. Presently clad in a variety of materials, the roofs historically consisted of a number of intricate pitches that rose from the main hip or gable. The forms of the dwellings were typically accentuated by corner towers, porches, and bay windows, accented with columns, balustrades, and patterned shingles. The dwelling at 800 Forbes Street (1910) further illustrates the imposing Queen Anne style popular in Chesterfield Heights. The two-and-a-half-story wood-frame building presents a wrap-around porch supported by Tuscan columns. Off-center projecting gables with peak tri-partite multi-light window distinguish this Queen Anne residence. The dwelling located at 2810 Marlboro Avenue (1900) also illustrates a multitude of Queen Anne details. These include the hipped roof, off-center projecting gable, the wrap-around porch, Tuscan post balustrade and canted bay windows. Additionally, the dwelling at 2628 Marlboro Avenue (1910) is representative of the types of Queen Anne dwelling constructed in the early years of the community. Details include the use of a variety of cladding materials, including a

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square-butt wood-shingled second story, and a decorative diamond-patterned shingled off-center gable. The dwelling also exhibits a full-width one-story porch with Tuscan column supports, a canted bay on the second story, and side elevation gables.

A slight influence of the Italianate style is evident in the design of the dwelling at 2810 Kimball Terrace, but it was presented in its more vernacular form. Constructed in 1905, the stuccoed, two-story brick building features a low-pitched hipped roof, a decorative wood cornice, a masonry beltcourse, and a flat-fronted elevation with arched window openings and surrounds. Ghostlines of the original one-story porch, now removed, are visible across the facade. The Italianate style, prevalent from the late 1880s to the 1920s, was popularized in England during the Picturesque movement. Identifying features include bracketed cornices, elongated arched windows, bracketed porch supports, molded window hoods, shallow-pitched roofs, beltcourses, and decorative window surrounds.

More vernacular interpretations of these styles were also prevalent throughout the neighborhood during this first phase of building construction. Three of these remain standing and include 707 Forbes Street (1910), 734 Filer Street (1910) and 733 Filer Street (1913). The wood-frame buildings at 707 Forbes Street and 734 Filer Street present a gable-front front with a lack of exterior detailing, while the dwelling at 733 Filer Street (1913) features a similar gable-front form with exposed rafter tails.

Subsequent Development in Chesterfield Heights (1915-1950)

Construction in Chesterfield Heights picked up in the second decade of the 20th century. The pace of this development in Chesterfield Heights, between 1915 and 1941, was greatly effected by the influx of workers to the port community during the First World War (1914-1918). During this period, approximately 235 buildings were erected, compared to the approximately 100 previously built. Respecting the architectural heritage of the planned community, the craftsmanship of the building construction remained prominent. By this period, Colonial Revival houses continued to be built, though house sizes and stylistic features had begun to change with the construction of a significant numbers of smaller, less ornamented houses. Numerous examples of buildings in Chesterfield Heights demonstrate the shift to slightly smaller Colonial Revival-style dwellings. The Colonial Revival dwelling at 2633 Marlboro Avenue (1920) represents this shift in construction practice. The dwelling displays a front-

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gabled/gambrel roof, a small gabled portico, and symmetrical fenestration. Additionally, the house at 2721 Kimball Terrace (1925) exhibits a pedimented entry, a molded cornice with returns, and a front-gabled roof.

The architecture of this period soon shifted from the Colonial Revival with the introduction of the Craftsman/Bungalow style and form. The form was typically covered by a low-pitched, intersecting gable roof that encompassed an often-wrapping porch, while stylistic Craftsman details include exposed rafters, overhanging eaves, multi-light windows, and battered posts. Chesterfield Heights' second building phase was clearly dominated by this style and form, which increased tremendously in popularity during this time nationwide. Approximately 120 of the over 225 buildings constructed between 1915 and 1950 in Chesterfield Heights were Craftsman in style or Bungalow in form. The one- to one-and-a-half-story bungalow, which earlier had mimicked the architectural ornament of the late Victorian period, later displayed the fashionable Craftsman style. Magazines led the way in introducing affordable housing to the new mobile consumers.

Examples of dwellings in Chesterfield Heights erected following this stylish building trend, which was popular in the first and into the second quarter of the 20th century, include 2627 Marlboro Avenue (1920), 2808 Stanhope Avenue (1925) and 2933 Victoria Avenue (1930), among numerous others.

The one-and-a-half-story bungalow located at 2808 Stanhope Avenue (1925) also reflects the Craftsman style. The wood shingle-clad dwelling is crowned with a large central shed projecting gable porch, a gabled dormer, and overhanging bracketed eaves.

The building at 2722 Westminister Avenue (1925), typical of the form, presents a full-width porch supported by tapered post on brick piers, a shallow-pitched gable roof with overhanging eaves and knee bracket supports, and square-edge wood window surrounds.

The modest dwelling at 2933 Victoria Avenue (1930) was constructed illustrating the fashionable Craftsman-style architectural trends of the day, including multiple projecting gables, cut-out brackets, dwarf-post piers, a multi-light entry, exposed rafters, and a wood cornice with curvilinear decorative return.

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Augmenting the bungalow is the American Foursquare building form. The two-story, four-room-per-house plan without a hall is a much-used concept that refers to the hall/parlor plan of the 18th century. Popular throughout the nation, the foursquare provided the working and middle class with a larger, more stylish form that lacked the traditional ornamentation. Consequently, the form was cheaper to construct and fit well with an egalitarian society's demand for simple building materials that made no false claims to richness.² Additionally, the foursquare suited the modern building techniques and materials that ranged from conventional frames covered in weatherboard, shingles or brick veneer to solid brick, cast-cement block, or poured concrete.

Following the ubiquitous form associated with the building's nomenclature, the dwelling located at 2714 Chesterfield Boulevard (1915) is an excellent example of the Craftsman-style foursquare. The building is characterized by its cubic shape, overhanging eaves with exposed rafters, a central hipped dormer, and full-width projecting one-story porch. Other examples of the foursquare form, often more Colonial-Revival inspired, include the dwellings at 2706 Chesterfield Boulevard (1915), 2707 Kimball Terrace (1920), and 2700 Marlboro Avenue (1930).

Throughout the United States, a notable number of these types of dwellings were prefabricated kit or mail-order houses from companies including Sears Roebuck, Aladdin Homes, the Hodgson Company, Montgomery Ward, and the Ray H. Bennett Lumber Company, among others. The kit houses were often purchased by a builder, who copied the plans when constructing other dwellings of the same design. As a result, it is often difficult to determine from the exterior which dwellings are actual kit houses or copied designs. Although, no research revealed specific examples in Chesterfield Heights, the widespread popularity and use of kit houses suggests that at least a few were constructed.

As the development of Chesterfield Heights entered the 1920s, a handful of multiple dwellings began to appear as an alternative to the single dwelling. Although a Colonial Revival-inspired multiple dwelling appeared in 1910, three additional buildings appeared in Chesterfield Heights during the 1920s, displaying popular architectural styles. Commonly applied to commercial and public buildings in the 1920s and 1930s, the Art Deco style was often expressed through the building's form rather than through applied ornamentation. This was particularly evident on rooflines with parapets, projecting wall planes, and curvilinear elements. The color contrast distinctive of this style is present in the variation of building materials, including glass block, metal, granite, limestone, marble, and stucco. One of the best examples

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of the Art Deco style in Chesterfield Heights, albeit a vernacular interpretation, is the pair of multiple dwellings located at 2620-2622 and 2624-2626 Kimball Terrace (both 1920). The two-story buildings are indicative of the Art Deco style with their multi-gabled parapets, pent roofs, and decorative brickwork.

Showing the initial influence of the automobile, many of the dwellings within Chesterfield Heights exhibit freestanding garages. These structures are typically built of wood frame, often matching the cladding of the primary dwelling, and are capped with gable roofs. A number of the properties also exhibit sheds and carports, though many are non-historic, dating to the last quarter of the 20th century.

Initial commercial development in Chesterfield Heights was located along Holly Avenue (Westminster Avenue) and included a circa 1910 lumber and wood veneer factory. During the 1930s, limited commercial development was established along Kimball Terrace. This included a shipbuilding facility and a small strip of commercial storefronts along the 2400 block of Kimball Terrace. The original commercial buildings retain their non-residential use. The development was primarily low-scale, rising just one or two stories in height. The masonry structures have flat roofs with parapets, show windows, and ornamentation composed of the varying building materials. Examples include the buildings at 2406-2408 and 2316-2318 Kimball Terrace, both constructed circa 1940.

Other more modest buildings were also erected during the mid-20th century in Chesterfield Heights. Illustrative of this type of housing is the dwelling at 2901 Victoria Avenue (1930), which is detailed with a gabled dormer, a central gabled entry, an off-center-projecting gable, and a molded cornice. The one-and-a-half story dwelling stands as an example of the Cape Cod-inspired buildings that were also popular during the mid-20th-century. Similarly, the Tudor Revival-style, derived from 16th century Elizabethan and Jacobean England, was popular in the United States for mid-20th-century suburban construction. Modest examples of the style are featured in Chesterfield Heights. Located at 2718 and 2808 Chesterfield Boulevard, both examples were constructed circa 1940. Character-defining features of the style that are displayed in these dwellings include a steeply pitched roof and a front-elevation exterior chimney.

The last building to be constructed during Chesterfield Heights' period of significance is the St. Luke's Holiness Church of Christ's Disciples located at 80 Norchester Avenue, constructed circa 1950. The historic building marks the end of the building boom in the neighborhood and reflects the need for community-oriented buildings. Presenting no specific architectural style, the masonry building displays a

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front-gabled roof with central entry, overhanging eaves, and later additions. Three other churches were previously established in the community, including the Monticello Baptist Church at 2722 Kimball Terrace (1925), the church at 2400 Kimball Terrace (1930), and the Garrett Community Church at 2843 Victoria Avenue (1940). The Monticello Baptist Church, which was moved to its present site in 1964, presents a Bungalow/Craftsman form/style. The church at 2400 Kimball Terrace was established in a circa 1930 masonry commercial building, though the date of its occupation of the building is unknown. Constructed on the corner of Ballentine Boulevard and Victoria Avenue, the Garrett Community Church (1940) is typical of masonry buildings constructed during the period. It features a gable-front with sandstone door surround, exterior brick buttresses, and an entry vestibule. A circa 1960 addition extends to the west. The establishment of these four neighborhood churches further evidences the stability of the community by 1950.

Development After 1950

Chesterfield Heights experienced a further lull in residential construction, with just thirty-six more dwellings erected in the neighborhood after 1950. By the mid-20th century, domestic buildings began to take on an even smaller scale and more modest detailing, as reflective of the overriding trends of the period. The fashion of styles and forms of the infill construction during this period was limited, making the dwellings differ architecturally from their predecessors, with few representing a specific architectural style. Each of these dwellings, constructed between 1950 and 1995, is predominately stripped of the previously common applied stylistic detailing.

Showing the increased influence of the automobile, another trend exhibited in these dwellings is the attached garage, which began to show up in the neighborhood after World War II. Examples can be seen at 2623 Kimball Terrace (1945), 2808 Earls court Avenue (1920, but garage added circa 1980), 2619 Marlboro Avenue (1960), 2800 Norchester Street (1980), and 2616 Marlboro Avenue (1990). These attached garages are set either in side wings or on the façade of the dwelling and have roll-up garage doors.

The residential buildings constructed in Chesterfield Heights after 1950 were primarily built on the unimproved lots laid out in the original 1904 plat of Chesterfield Heights and in Riverside. Consequently, there was no subdivision of existing lots, and the scenic vistas with pockets of landscaped parks remained

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consistent with the original design intentions of the land developer. Similarly, the neighborhood had not been flawed by the introduction of commercial or light industrial properties despite the nominal development along Kimball Terrace. The Grandy Park public housing complex, containing 400 units, was constructed in 1952 on the east end of the neighborhood. The previously undeveloped area was soon thereafter disassociated with the remaining neighborhood.

Most of the residential infill construction during this period consisted of small, one-to-two-story dwellings, some with attached garages. Examples of this type of construction include the dwellings at 2718 Kimball Terrace (1960) and 2700 Chesterfield Boulevard (1970), among others. The two-story dwelling at 2718 Kimball Terrace features a stretcher-bond brick first story and a vinyl-clad second story. The building presents a gable-fronted form with minimal detailing. Similarly, the dwelling at 2700 Chesterfield Boulevard represents the infill construction after 1950. The one-story wood frame building features a low-pitched hip roof, a brick stretcher-bond veneer on the façade, and limited detailing.

The most substantial change to the neighborhood occurred in 1967 with the construction of the Virginia Beach Expressway, which became Interstate-264 in 1999. Although the original project was responsible for the demolition of a number of historic resources, the project ultimately shielded the community from becoming a major transportation thoroughfare and helped to discourage modern commercial encroachment.

¹ In 1967 the creation of the Virginia Beach Expressway (Interstate 264) resulted in the demolition of numerous buildings along the northern sections of the neighborhood.

² James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell. "The All-American Family House: A Look at the Foursquare." *Old House Journal*, Volume XXIII. Number 6, November/December 1995, p. 31.